Hope

&

Joy

A Women’s Retreat Planning Guide
The mission of CTA is to glorify God by providing purposeful products that lift up and encourage the body of Christ—because we love him!

Hope & Joy
A Women’s Retreat Planning Guide

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If this retreat planner proves to be helpful to you, we would like to hear from you. Your words will encourage us! If you have suggestions for us to consider as we create ministry helps like this in the future, please send those, too. Send e-mail to editor@CTAinc.com. Please include the subject line: HAJ3DR. Or write to Editorial Coordinator, Dept. HAJ3DR. PO Box 1205, Fenton, MO 63026-1205.
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Getting Started

This guide will help you plan a simple, two- or three-hour mini retreat for women’s groups in your congregation or Christian organization. While intended for groups of from 5 to 35, the material can be adapted for larger and smaller groups. By adjusting the schedule a bit, you may shorten or lengthen the retreat to meet the needs of your group.

To shorten it, use only one of the two discussion sections. You may want to use the other one on the Sunday morning after the retreat or at your next regularly scheduled women’s ministry meeting.

To lengthen it, consider spending more time on each of the two sessions. Or add more material (for example, additional time for group worship, a craft, breakfast or a light lunch, or a prayer labyrinth activity).

Details, Details

If you and your group are new to retreat planning, many helpful guidebooks will walk you step-by-step through the details. Visit your local Christian bookstore or log on to your favorite online bookseller and type “Christian retreat planning” into the search engine.

On the other hand, if you have participated in a few retreats or have planned them previously, you will probably be able to think through the various details on your own.

In either case, you’ll probably need to arrange for . . .

**Prayer** for leaders and participants before, during, and after the retreat.

**Accommodations** at a nearby retreat center, hotel meeting room, bed and breakfast, lakeside condominium, or some other inviting location if you intend to take your group off-site.

**Transportation** or carpooling to the location, if necessary.

**Hospitality**, including arranging chairs and tables in the meeting room (unless the facility you use provides this), distributing goodie bags, welcoming participants, and creating “welcome packets.” These packets should include information about the facility at which you are staying, amenities (for example, walking paths, a prayer chapel), and pertinent “housekeeping details.”

**Snacks**, if the facility you’ve chosen doesn’t offer them. Consider providing various kinds of tea and asking each participant to bring a dozen of her favorite cookies. Or ask everyone to contribute one Trail Mix ingredient. Bring a large mixing bowl, a wooden spoon, napkins, and mix the ingredients together to share at an informal break time.
Publicity, including asking regular attenders to invite friends. CTA has created an attractive postcards especially for this purpose. You may print them out for free by going to www.CTAinc.com/FREE.

Program, including coordination of a guest speaker, if you use one; small-group discussion leaders; and music for worship. Program planners will want to consider providing modest, themed thank-you gifts for those who carry major leadership responsibilities for the retreat. For example, the easel-backed picture frame (Item #HAJ3MF) or the Hope & Joy insulated tumbler with straw (Item #HAJ3APT) would be especially appropriate. See your CTA catalog or the CTA website at www.CTAinc.com for details.

Leadership for the activities you plan to include, for example, the craft/project activities, lunch, or music/worship.

Most important, you will also need one go-to person who is willing to coordinate the details listed above and answer questions as they arise from volunteer workers and potential registrants.
Goodie Bags and Retreat Favors

The hospitality committee should create a package of inexpensive gift reminders for each person attending. A gracious benefactor might want to pick up the cost. Otherwise, build the cost into the retreat fee. CTA offers a number of Hope & Joy themed products appropriate for this purpose, including:

- 30 Scripture cards in keepsake box (English and Spanish) (Item #HAJ3HB)
- Bookmark and pen gift set (English and Spanish) (Item #HAJ3ST)
- Mirror keychain (English and Spanish) (Item #HAJ3MKC)
- Two-toned ceramic mug in gift box (English and Spanish) (Item #HAJ3CMB)
- Pump flashlight (English and Spanish) (Item #HAJ3FL)
- Jumbo bookmark and pen set (English and Spanish) (Item #HAJ3JST)
- Easel-backed magnetic frame (English and Spanish) (Item #HAJ3MF)
Goodie Bags and Retreat Favors Cont....

- Notepad and sticky notes (English only) (Item #HAJ3NP)
- Insulated tumbler with straw (English only) (Item #HAJ3APT)

Most of these items can be purchased by the dozen at an amazing price!

If you have a limited budget, consider using some of the items above to create two or three gift sets and award them as door prizes. Draw names. Tape a note under “winning chairs” or a “winning lunch plate.” Or award prizes to the people who traveled the farthest or who will celebrate her birthday soonest.

Or simply arrange a variety of themed gift baskets on each table and invite participants to choose one or two items from the basket that they would especially like to have.
Regarding the Small-Group Sessions

As you prepare for the retreat discussions . . .

• Use preregistration information to set up discussion groups of 4–5 members or simply let participants form their own groups the day of the retreat. If you pre-select group members, consider creating place cards and arranging them appropriately at tables.

• If you organize groups ahead of time, select one person from each group who has some leadership skills and the faith and understandings helpful in leading the discussion. Ask this person ahead of time to facilitate her group. Make it clear that she is not the “teacher.” Rather, her main job is to keep discussion moving along and to make sure each person has opportunities to share in the conversation.

• Duplicate copies of the discussion guides for the two discussion sessions. See pages 13 and 15. Each participant will need a copy. Although copies are designed in full color, they’ll still look very nice if copied in black and white.

• Retreat leaders should ensure that guests who have come by themselves and other individuals who need help finding friends during the grouping-up process are welcomed into an appropriate group. Consider using CTA’s name tag template from this theme (available for FREE at www.CTAinc.com/FREE) to facilitate introductions.

As you begin each discussion session, someone in leadership should distribute the appropriate discussion guide for that session and explain the time budget for completing the discussion guide. Encourage group members to listen carefully to one another’s comments and adding thoughtful, helpful responses themselves.

When discussion time for each session has expired, a retreat leader should call for the whole group’s attention; ask for insights, comments, or questions; and respond appropriately. If you have a leader whose insights and biblical knowledge participants will respect, and if that person feels comfortable fielding questions and making comments without prior preparation, consider letting her preside over all the small-group debriefing sessions during the retreat. If not, simply frame each debriefing time as a time to share insights. Remember, the main purpose of this retreat is to deepen relationships, to provide a respite from the busyness of life, and to encourage participants in their faith relationship with Jesus. Reserve in-depth Bible study for other settings in your church.
Session 1: Hope—Sure and Certain!
Small-group discussion—30 minutes

Key Scripture Verse: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.
Romans 15:13

Each person needs . . .
• Copy of the discussion guide (page 14)
• Bible
• Hope & Joy jumbo bookmark and pen set (Item #HAJ3JST)

Have participants sit down near others in their group.

Distribute the discussion guides and the Hope & Joy bookmark and pen sets.

If you have enlisted small-group discussion leaders ahead of time, introduce them now. If not, ask each small group to choose a leader. Explain that this person is not the teacher. Instead, she is responsible for keeping track of time, making sure everyone has a chance to participate, and keeping everyone focused on the questions in the discussion guide. In each of today’s sessions, a different person will serve as leader.

When about five minutes of the session remain, a retreat planner should alert the whole group to this fact. When time has fully expired, call for everyone’s attention; ask for insights, comments, or questions; and respond appropriately.

Break

Plan a 15–20 minute break between discussion sessions, depending on the time available. Serve snacks, tea, coffee, and perhaps soft drinks. Invite those who are interested to take a quick walk together. Explore the amenities available at the retreat site you have chosen. Encourage everyone to get to know one or two other participants better.

Consider giving each person who attends a Hope & Joy ceramic mug (Item #HAJ3CMB) to use now and to take home after the retreat as a reminder of these good gifts from our Lord.
Session 2: Joy—Inexpressible and Full of Glory

Small-group discussion—30 minutes

Key Scripture Verse: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.* Romans 15:13

Each person needs . . .

- Copy of the discussion guide (page 15–16)
- Bible
- *Hope & Joy* Scripture cards (Item #HAJ3HB)

This session will work in much the same way as Session 1. Call participants back together and distribute the discussion guides and the *Hope & Joy* Scripture cards.

Remind everyone that the group leader is *not the teacher.* Instead, she is responsible for keeping track of time, making sure everyone has a chance to participate, and keeping everyone focused on the questions in the discussion guide.

When about five minutes of the session remain, a retreat planner should alert the whole group to this fact. When time has fully expired, call for everyone’s attention; ask for insights, comments, or questions; and respond appropriately.

Lunch (optional)

If you plan to each lunch together, one of the retreat leaders should briefly explain the process for serving. Then invite group members to join in prayer, thanking God for the meal.

Relaxing Together (optional)

Large-group session—relaxation, entertainment

Key Scripture Verse: *A cheerful heart is good medicine.* Proverbs 17:22

Read Proverbs 17:22 and invite everyone to join in the fun as you relax and enjoy some time growing together as sisters in Jesus. Then call the entertainment team forward, turn them loose, and let the frivolous fun begin!

You may use the time in any of several ways. Depending upon the facilities available to you, the setting of your retreat, the time of year, the weather outside, and group members’ interests and abilities, you may wish to offer options like these:
• Shoulder massages
• A YouTube Christian comedian
• A CD or DVD that will guide the group in relaxing (key “Christian relaxation” into your Web browser’s search engine)
• A mission presentation or project
• Skits or a talent show
• Board games
• Aerobics, volleyball, basketball, softball
• Scrapbooking
• Quilting lessons or a quilting project
• Knitting lessons or a knitting project
• A nature hike
• A foot waxing or manicure party
• Healthful recipes exchange

Closing Devotion

10–15 minutes

Begin your closing worship with a prayer of thanks and perhaps one or two songs or hymns of praise.

Read Philippians 1:2–11 slowly and aloud. You might have two or three people read the same verses, in turn, each from a different Bible version. Ask participants to close their eyes as they listen to the Word that God has for them right now. Ask that they listen for words that bring hope, joy, and peace.

Then repeat a worship chorus or hymn the group knows well and can sing with heartfelt joy.

Use this verse as a closing blessing: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (Romans 16:20). Read it together, blessing one another in Jesus’ name. Or have one of the retreat leaders pray it over the group.

Thank participants for coming and share announcements.
Participant Handouts and Other Helps
Sample Schedules

Option 1: Saturday Morning Retreat

9:00  Arrival, greeting, relaxing
9:30  Session 1: Hope—Sure and Certain! (small-group discussion)
10:00 Relaxing Together (large-group activity)
10:45 Break
11:00 Session 2: Joy—Inexpressible and Full of Glory (small-group discussion)
11:30 Closing devotion

Noon Lunch

Option 2: Friday Evening Retreat

5:00  Arrival, greeting, relaxing
5:30  Session 1: Hope—Sure and Certain! (small-group discussion)
6:00  Light supper
6:45 Relaxing Together (large-group activity)
8:00  Session 2: Joy—Inexpressible and Full of Glory (small-group discussion)
8:30 Closing devotion
1. **5 minutes** Consider the following expressions. All mention the word “hope.” Add one or more of your own to the list if you can. If you had only these expressions to work from, how would you define “hope”?

   “I’m just hoping to goodness that . . . “
   “Wishing and hoping won’t make it so.”
   “I hope it doesn’t rain on our parade.”
   “I’ve given up hope.”

2. **10 minutes** Read Hebrews 6:18–19, noting how the word “hope” is used in the text.

   • How does this kind of “hope” compare with the definition you just developed?
   • At the graveside during funerals, pastors who serve liturgical churches often mention “the sure and certain hope of the resurrection.” The words bring to mind both the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus and his promise to raise us, too, from death one day. Using this phrase and the words from Hebrews 6 you just read, how would you define “Christian hope”? On what is this kind of hope based?

3. **10 minutes** Now read Romans 15:13 from your Bible or from the bookmark you have received. Paul calls our Lord “the God of hope.” What has God said and done to stir hope in your heart? On the back of this paper list as many answers to this question as you can. Then share one of your answers with your group.

4. **5 minutes** On the lines below, write a note to Jesus about a situation for which you need fresh confidence, renewed hope. Pour out your heart and trust him to refill it. (You won’t be asked to share your words or thoughts, so feel free to be honest.)

   Dear Jesus,

   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

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Session 2: Joy—Inexpressible and Full of Glory

1. 5 minutes In the space below, list the titles of songs that focus on joy—use both Christian and more secular songs, too. Include as many different musical styles as you can, from the Sunday school song “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy” to the classical “Ode to Joy.” Then share your list with your group. How are joy and singing connected?

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

2. 10 minutes Skim through the cards in the box you have received, paying particular attention to the Scripture verses on each card. Share with your group one or two verses you like most. Why did you select the ones you did?

3. 10 minutes Now read (or reread) Romans 15:13, either from your Bible or from the bookmark you received. Talk with your group about these questions:

• How does the hope God gives in the cross and empty tomb of his Son, Jesus, “fill you with joy”?

• How are “hope” and “peace” alike? How are they different?

• How does the hope Christ gives create peace in your heart?
Session 2: Continued

Spend a few moments in quiet reflection, based on what you’ve just said to each other and on the Scripture verses you’ve read. Write a prayer you will pray each morning in the week ahead, asking God to keep his promise to give you hope, joy, and peace in your Savior. (Again, you won’t be asked to share what you write, so feel free to open your heart to your Savior.)

Dear Jesus,

________________________________________________________________________

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